

have in the House and the Senate about things that aren't going right, but to share with them the joy we have with the things that they are doing to improve.

Then we have set goals for next year, a full implementation of the Veterans Choice Program and a consolidation of all veterans' benefits and VA benefits to see to it that veterans get timely appointments and good-quality services from the physicians in the VA or physicians in their communities.

We are going to improve the experience of our servicemembers in transitioning from Active Duty to Veterans Affairs. Quite frankly, today that is the biggest problem we have in the country. Active-Duty servicemembers who leave service and go to veteran status fall into a black hole. There is no interoperability of VA and DOD health care records and electronic records. There is no transition in the handoff. We are going to see that change.

We are going to improve the experience of women veterans, including protecting victims of military sexual trauma.

We are going to combat veteran homelessness and meet the goal of the President to get it to zero. We have already reduced it by a third.

We are going to ensure access to mental health so no veteran who finds himself in trouble doesn't have immediate access to counsel. On that point, I commend the Veterans Administration for the hotline. The suicide prevention hotline that they established has helped to save lives in this country this year, and we are going to continue to see to it that we have more and more access for our veterans.

Simply put, we are going to make the Veterans Administration work for the veterans and work for the American people. We are going to have accountability of the employees. We are going to reward good behavior, and we are not going to accept bad behavior. In the end, we are going to take the veteran of America, who served his or her country, and make sure that they get every benefit that is promised to them and that it is delivered in a high-quality fashion. We are going to do it working together as Republicans and Democrats and as Members of the Senate to do so.

As we close this year, I wish to pause and thank the Members of the Senate for their unanimous bipartisan support for the significant changes we have made to address the problems of the Veterans Administration and to remember this season of the year in Christmas the great gift we have had to all of us of our veterans who have served us, many of whom have sacrificed and some of whom have died to see that America remains the strongest, most peaceful, and freest country on the face of this Earth.

With that, I pause and yield back the remainder of my time.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. SASSE). The Senator from Oklahoma.

#### EXTENSION OF MORNING BUSINESS

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the Senate be in a period of morning business, with Senators permitted to speak therein for up to 10 minutes each.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that at the conclusion of my remarks, we have joint remarks from myself and the Senator from New Mexico, Mr. UDALL.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### OMNIBUS LEGISLATION

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I will not go into the detail I was planning to go into as to what we are faced with and what we are going to be voting on tomorrow, but I think it is very important—because I have heard a lot of erroneous things coming out of various talk radio shows and elsewhere—as to how we got into the mess we are in where we are going to be looking at a major spending bill instead of the normal way of doing things.

Historically, in both the House and the Senate, the order has been to do an authorization bill, and that is followed by an appropriations bill. That works out fine in the House. In the Senate, it is not quite that easy because we have some rules in the Senate that allow the minority—whether that be Republican or Democratic—to object to a procedural basis. So it actually takes 60 votes, not 51 votes, to pass appropriations. This has created a real problem.

I remember that on June 18, we passed the Defense Authorization Act. Given that we are in a time of war, it was incredibly important to provide our Defense Department what in the regular course of business would be appropriated to it. However, we have been trying to appropriate that since June 18, and the minority has kept us from doing that. I can say the same thing about other appropriations bills, such as Military Construction, Veterans Affairs, Energy and Water, and others.

One might say: Why would they be doing this? In the case of the appropriations bill for defense, it is very simple: The President and a lot of the Democrats want to make sure that as we are coming out with additional spending to avoid sequestration, an equal amount be used for domestic purposes instead of military, where we really have a crisis right now.

Let me say something about the House. This morning on a talk show, I heard everyone criticizing the House and the new Speaker of the House. In reality, they did their job over there. That is a bum rap for those guys. They passed their appropriations bills. They passed them on the floor. They passed appropriations bills on the floor. So they did what was supposed to be done. However, you can't pass legislation

with just the House; it has to be in the Senate also.

So I think we need to look at that. I don't like the idea of a situation where we are faced with a "take it or leave it" deal at the end of the year. That doesn't really allow us to offer amendments. It is done behind closed doors by a limited number of people. This is not right. This is not the way it is supposed to be.

I would just say there is a way out. I am going to suggest that this should be the last time we should have to do this. If we had a system where we could reform it and have it so you could make an exception to some of the motions to proceed for appropriations bills, then we would be able to go ahead and get this done. That is the simple solution. That is what I would recommend. However, there is a lot more detail in that. It happens that there is a committee taking place right now in the Senate. JAMES LANKFORD, my junior Senator from Oklahoma, CORY GARDNER, LAMAR ALEXANDER, and I think two other Senators are looking to propose rule changes, and I think it is overdue.

I want to mention one other thing too. I said back in 2006 that I would never vote for another omnibus bill like the one we are preparing to vote for. I said: That is the last one; I am going to serve notice—thinking that if enough people did this, we wouldn't find ourselves in this position. However, we are still in this position.

The reason I am standing here today is to get on the record why I am going to support this. Back when I had the highway bill, we were trying to put additional things on the highway bill. One was to lift the ban on exports of oil and gas, and we were not successful. So at that time, I made the announcement—we had a couple of other chances, the last one being the omnibus spending bill. We got a commitment that would be on that bill. So I said at that time that if that is the case, if we end up lifting the ban on that bill, then I will change from my original 2006 commitment and I will vote for and support this.

When we stop and think about what we are doing, does it make good policy that we in the United States can say to Russia and say to Iran, people who don't look after our best interests: It is all right for you to do that, but we in the United States cannot export oil.

We have all the former Soviet Union countries. I went to Lithuania and participated in an opening of a terminal there so they could get out from under this restriction. It was a joyous occasion.

In my State of Oklahoma, we have lost 20,000 jobs because since we have had success in getting oil and gas out, we have been encumbered by the fact that we can't export it. This has been a real hardship. I would say the most important thing in this bill in terms of my State would be that we are going to be able to correct that and we are going to be able to do that.